

RECOGNIZING FEMICIDE AS A STANDALONE CRIME:

Policy and Advocacy Recommendations
from Albania, North Macedonia, and Serbia

**Recognizing Femicide as a Standalone Crime: Policy and Advocacy
Recommendations from Albania, North Macedonia, and Serbia**

This Policy Paper is prepared by the Regional Cooperation Team of the Regional Youth Leadership Mobility Programme 2025/2026 (RYLMP).

Authors:

Angela Dimovska, North Macedonia

Edit Babameto, Albania

Jana Kristic, Serbia

Mentor:

Ivana Nikolic, (Co) Aleksandra Vjelovic, (Co) Natalia Zunic

Editor: Abi Dodbiba

The Regional Youth Leadership Mobility Programme is a collaborative effort between the Centre for Science and Innovation for Development (SCiDEV), the Youth Educational Forum (YEF) from North Macedonia, and the Youth Initiative for Human Rights (YIHR) from Serbia with the financial support of the Open Society Foundations in Western Balkans (OSFWB).

The views in this document are solely of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the project cohort nor the Open Society Foundation Western Balkans (OSFWB).

Executive Summary

This policy paper examines the institutional and legal gaps in femicide legislation and implementation in Albania, North Macedonia, and Serbia. Prompted by repeated killings of women in the three countries, and the inadequate protection available to women facing abuse, this research reviews each country's legal framework, the institutional barriers victims encounter, and outlines illustrative cases and the media's role in shaping public perception.

The research shows that North Macedonia is the only country out of the three to have introduced femicide into its Criminal Code, yet implementation and monitoring lag behind. Albania and Serbia have not criminalized femicide, despite explicit recommendations from international monitoring bodies, and killings of women continue to be prosecuted under gender-neutral homicide provisions. All three countries display similar patterns in prosecutorial failures, lack of adequate protections, weak risk assessment, unreliable data, harmful media reporting, and a civil society sector carrying responsibilities that belong to the state.

This paper concludes with country-specific recommendations for improving protections for victims of gender-based violence within their respective contexts. For North Macedonia, these focus on the implementation and monitoring of the existing law, taking into account the difficulties faced by ethnic minorities and the influence of media coverage. For Albania, they center on amending its Criminal Code, assuming state responsibility, and introducing mandatory risk assessments for reports of abuse. For Serbia, they call for a national femicide monitoring mechanism, stronger regulations for media and ethical reporting, and improved risk assessment. This paper is intended as a blueprint for femicide advocacy to institutions, authorities and the general public.

List of Acronyms

AIRE (Centre)	The Advice on Individual Rights in Europe Centre
AWEN	Albanian Women Empowerment Network
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
CSO	Civil Society Organization
DV	Domestic Violence
GBV	Gender-Based Violence
GREVIO	Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence
KMD	Commissioner for Protection from Discrimination (Albania)
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
UN	United Nations
UN Women	United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNODC	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime

1. Introduction

The crime of femicide – the intentional killing of women and girls because of their gender – represents the most extreme, brutal, and irreversible manifestation of patriarchal violence. Globally, a woman or girl is killed every ten minutes, predominantly by individuals known to them, often within the supposed safety of their own homes (UN Women, 2025c). In the Western Balkans, femicide is a critical issue that has been systemically overlooked by institutions and relevant actors alike. This crisis assumes a deeply localized and culturally rooted dimension, where historical patriarchal structures, systemic institutional failures, and profound gaps in the legal framework allow a preventable epidemic to persist. The urgency of addressing this phenomenon extends far beyond academic observation; it demands immediate emotional resonance, cross-border solidarity, and decisive policy disruption.

Across Albania, North Macedonia, and Serbia, civil society organizations, activists, and youth networks have increasingly mobilized to demand that the state cease treating the murder of women as standard homicide or generic domestic violence (Beker, 2023). Their core argument is that a legal system incapable of naming a crime is inherently incapable of preventing it. Obscuring gender-based killings behind gender-neutral terminology erases the motive behind these deaths, distorts official statistics, and prevents the allocation of resources for prevention (UN Women, 2025c).

This analysis examines the socio-legal landscape of femicide in Albania, North Macedonia, and Serbia, contextualized within a broader regional advocacy initiative involving researchers and youth leaders from across the Western Balkans. By dissecting the statistical realities, the tragic human narratives, the specific deficiencies in the current Criminal Codes, and the binding international obligations established by mechanisms such as the Istanbul Convention and the Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (GREVIO), a clear roadmap for legal reform and public advocacy emerges. The synthesis of rigorous policy analysis with emotionally resonant, youth-driven digital advocacy forms the foundation of a modern strategy to combat gender-based violence, shifting the paradigm from passive research to active, systemic disruption.

The genesis of this policy paper lies in a fundamental reassessment of how advocacy regarding gender-based violence must be conducted in the Western Balkans. For decades, academic institutions and non-governmental organizations have produced extensive research documenting the frequency of domestic violence, the gaps in legal frameworks, and the cultural

normalization of misogyny (Beker, 2023). However, consultations with frontline regional actors have revealed a critical strategic insight: conducting new, exhaustive academic research from the ground up yields diminishing returns. The data that can be realistically collected within the current fragmented institutional frameworks has already been gathered by these organizations. For many other aspects of gender-based violence, official data simply does not exist because the states have failed to create the necessary legal definitions and tracking mechanisms to capture it. Faced with this reality, the mandate for contemporary researchers and youth leaders has shifted. The most urgent requirement is no longer the passive accumulation of sociological data, but rather active contribution to the struggle itself through highly visible, cross-border advocacy. Legal reform regarding gender-based violence is not merely a technical legislative exercise; it is a battle for the public narrative, and youth-led advocacy is the pioneer of that battle.

This paper begins with clarifying what the term femicide entails, then examines each country's legal framework, its implementation in practice, and the media environment surrounding femicide cases. A regional comparison follows, and the brief closes with policy recommendations addressed to the institutions responsible for reform.

2. Defining Femicide

The term “femicide” was first coined in 1801, and, at its most basic, it denoted the killing of women; it garnered significant traction with its reintroduction in 1976 by feminist scholar Diana E.H. Russell (Canadian Femicide Observatory for Justice and Accountability, 2026). The most recent definition, which was presented at the United Nations Symposium on Femicide in 2012, describes femicide as “the killing of one or more females by one or more males because they are female” (ibid.). However, the definition still undergoes variation depending on country or world region, making it difficult to find a universally accepted conceptualization on femicide (ibid.). Reaching a consensus on the definition is critical since it could describe, report, prevent and eradicate femicide (Grzyb et al., 2018, pp.18).

At the time of writing, there is no definition specifically for the Western Balkans context. For the purpose of our analysis, femicide will be understood as the killing of a woman specifically because of her gender identity (The AIRE Centre [AIRE], 2023a, pp.10). As per this definition, there are certain criteria that need to be met for a crime to be defined as a femicide from a legal standpoint: particularly, the murder committed needs to be intentional, with a clear gender motivation, with consideration that the victim is always female (AIRE, 2023, pp.11). The

manifestation of femicide can come as a result of societal and patriarchal norms, gender stereotypes and discrimination against women in social positions (ibid.).

Scholars distinguish between direct and indirect femicides. Direct femicides include honor killings, intimate partner violence and dowry killings; while indirect femicides come as a result of unsafe abortion practices, human trafficking and organized crimes (AIRE, 2023a, pp.11-12). Intersecting factors such as race, age, ethnicity and geographic location place particular groups of women and girls at heightened risk, and definitions that ignore them exclude women who experience intersectional forms of gender-based violence (Hefti, 2022, pp.247-248). These distinctions matter for the Western Balkans: they provide the yardstick against which the region's legal frameworks – including North Macedonia's, currently the only femicide law in the region – must be measured. At the heart of the advocacy effort across the Western Balkans is the demand for the legal recognition of femicide as a distinct, unique conceptual crime requiring specialized judicial treatment.

3. Femicide in Albania

The Legal Void: The Unwillingness to Name the Crime

The Albanian Criminal Code (Law No. 7895, heavily amended over the subsequent decades) contains no specific provision, article, or clause that defines or criminalizes femicide (Kaçupi, 2026, pp.61-69). Instead, killings of women are prosecuted under generalized provisions for crimes against life, forcing a profoundly gendered crime into a gender-neutral legal framework. When a woman is murdered because of her gender in Albania, prosecutors are forced to rely on a patchwork of standard homicide articles. These include Article 76 (Intentional murder), Article 77 (Intentional murder in connection with another crime), Article 78 (Premeditated murder), and Article 79 (Murder under other qualifying circumstances) (UN Women, 2024b). Recognizing the need to address the high rates of violence occurring within the home, the Albanian legislature passed a significant amendment in 2013, introducing Article 79/c, which explicitly criminalizes “murder due to family relationships” with penalties of twenty years to life imprisonment (Kaçupi, 2026; UN Women, 2023c).

While the introduction of Article 79/c was championed at the time as a necessary step forward in acknowledging the domestic context of many homicides, it falls short of addressing femicide because it focuses exclusively on the relationship between the perpetrator and the victim, ignoring the gender-based motivation behind the killing. Femicide is not defined merely by where it happens or who commits it; it is defined by the misogynistic intent – the killing of a

woman because she is a woman, rooted in systemic patriarchal power imbalances. Under the current framework, a woman murdered by a stalker, a rejected suitor, a client in the sex industry, or an acquaintance motivated by extreme misogyny or so-called cultural “honor” would not fall under the severe protections of Article 79/c if no legally recognized family or intimate relationship existed. Consequently, the law creates an artificial hierarchy of victims, where gender-based killings outside the domestic sphere are treated as standard homicides, stripping the crime of its context and failing to hold the perpetrator accountable for the specific misogynistic nature of the act.

The legal “invisibility” weakens the justice process in three ways. Without a clear legal definition requiring courts to examine the pattern of abuse, controlling behavior, and gender-based power dynamics that usually lead up to the killing, judicial decisions can easily be influenced by entrenched gender stereotypes. This paves the way for defense attorneys to successfully exploit this legal void by relying on traditional interpretations of homicide, arguing for mitigating circumstances such as “crimes of passion,” sudden emotional distress, or provocation. The absence of a standalone crime also actively undermines the state’s ability to generate disaggregated data necessary for public policy. When a gender-based murder is prosecuted simply as an “aggravating circumstance” or a “family relation” homicide, the specific misogynistic nature of the crime is buried in generalized judicial statistics. As regional legal experts at the AIRE Centre have noted, it masks a societal crisis behind neutral legal terminology, obstructing the allocation of adequate resources for prevention (Vojinović, 2024).

Despite intense pressure from civil society and evidence of the law’s inadequacy, domestic legislative reform has stalled, reflecting a lack of political will. The draft revision of the Criminal Code debated through 2025 and early 2026 ultimately failed to introduce femicide as a distinct offense, with civil society organizations observing that femicide provisions were sidelined in a legislative debate dominated by defamation and press-freedom controversies (GOV.UK, 2026).

The Istanbul Convention, GREVIO, and CEDAW in Albania

The shortcomings of the Albanian Criminal Code place the country in breach of its binding international commitments under the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence, universally known as the Istanbul Convention. Article 46 of the Istanbul Convention mandates that factors

such as offenses against a current or former partner, repeated offenses, and offenses committed in the presence of a child be treated as aggravating circumstances in the determination of criminal sentences (Council of Europe, 2011). Article 42 prohibits invoking culture, custom, religion, tradition, or “honor” as acceptable justifications for acts of violence (Council of Europe, 2011). While Albania has made attempts to integrate some of these aggravating factors into the general part of its Criminal Code, extensive comparative legal analyses conclude that this integration remains incomplete, ambiguous, and fails to explicitly mandate the rigorous gender-sensitive judicial evaluation required for lethal violence (Kaçupi, 2026, pp.61-69).

The failure to comply with these standards has been noted by the international community. The Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (GREVIO), the independent human rights monitoring body mandated to oversee the implementation of the Istanbul Convention, conducted its first thematic evaluation of Albania, publishing a report in September 2024, which , documented high attrition rates, systemic delays and low conviction rates that undermine victims’ trust; a critical absence of standardized, multi-agency risk assessment tools; and protection orders routinely breached by perpetrators and inadequately monitored by police, rendering them largely ineffective in practice (GREVIO 2024; UN Women 2024b). GREVIO also urged Albania to align its criminal law with the Convention – including replacing force-based definitions of sexual violence with the consent-based standard of Article 36 – and to establish retrospective reviews of gender-based killings (domestic homicide reviews) to hold state agencies accountable for failures to protect.

The CEDAW Committee reached similar conclusions in its 2023 concluding observations, recommending that Albania amend its Criminal Code to “specifically criminalize femicide and cyberviolence” and strengthen the criminal law response to all forms of gender-based violence against women. Together, the findings of the CEDAW Committee and GREVIO point to a clear international consensus that the current Albanian legal framework remains inadequate.

On the Ground: Review of a Notable Case

Femicide in Albania is rarely an isolated eruption of violence; it is the fatal culmination of a continuum of abuse, coercive control and institutional negligence. The Dan Hutra case of March 2023 illustrates this with brutal clarity. Hutra had been convicted of rape and hostage-taking in 2003 and of murdering his ex-wife in 2007, for which he served 16 years; rearrested in 2022 for violence against a new partner, he spent only months in custody. Released on 16 February 2023, he acquired an AK-47 – exposing, in the process, a serious gap in firearms

regulation – and within two weeks shot four women, killing three (Taylor, 2023). The case triggered mass protests outside the Ministry of Justice, with placards reading “I am three years old, 23 Albanian women have been murdered in my lifetime” and chants of “Women are killed, the state is silent”. Since 2022, activists have annually replaced the names of 20 streets in Tirana with the names of women murdered the previous year, and March 8 marches have adopted the slogan “We march, we don’t celebrate” (Çibuku, 2025).

The continuum of violence extends into the digital sphere: 41% of women and girls active online in Albania have experienced at least one form of digital violence, and preliminary findings from the 2024 Femicide Report link online blackmail and sustained psychological pressure to the suicides of at least two women (UN Women Albania, 2025b).

The Statistical Reality of Femicide in Albania

To build the case for the criminalization of femicide, emotional narratives must be rigorously anchored in empirical evidence. For years, the absence of a distinct legal definition of femicide in the Albanian Criminal Code resulted in statistical invisibility that minimized the gendered nature of the violence. However, the establishment of the Observatory on Femicide by the Ombudsperson (People’s Advocate) of Albania in March 2024, supported by UN Women and the Government of Sweden, marked a critical turning point in the standardization of data collection and institutional accountability (GOV.UK, 2026).

The Observatory bypasses the limitations of the domestic Criminal Code by applying the “Statistical Framework for Measuring the Gender-Related Killing of Women and Girls,” developed globally by UNODC and UN Women to analyze and categorize homicides in Albania (UNODC and UN Women, 2025). Findings for the 2021–2023 monitoring period are summarized in the table below:

Table 1. Observatory on Femicide, Albania, 2021-2023

Key femicide indicators in Albania (2021-2023)	Statistical data
Total women and girls killed	32 victims
Cases qualifying strictly as femicide	24 cases (meeting UN criteria for gender-related killing)
Killings by family members or intimate partners	27 of 32 cases
Femicides by intimate partners specifically	15 cases (63% of classified femicides)
Femicides by other family members	5 cases

Perpetrator demographics	28 perpetrators identified; 26 were men/boys, most aged 45-59
Victim demographics	Majority aged 30-59; 71% married; 83% had children
Crime location	Approximately 60% occurred in the victim's private residence
Generational impact	37 children lost their mothers to fatal violence
Highest-frequency municipalities	Tirana (6 cases), Fier (4), Elbasan (3)
Femicide rate (per 100,000 females)	2021: 0.85 2022: 0.50 2023: 0.84

This data reveals deep-seated, systemic flaws in the state's prevention and intervention mechanisms. It demonstrates that femicide in Albania is overwhelmingly foreseeable. Approximately 90% of the murdered women had suffered physical, psychological, or sexual abuse at the hands of the perpetrators prior to the fatal incident. Yet only 25% (six victims) had formally filed complaints with law enforcement before they were killed (UN Women, 2024b). This discrepancy between the occurrence of violence and the reporting of violence highlights a profound collapse of public trust in the judicial and law enforcement systems. It points to a deeply entrenched, patriarchal societal mentality that frequently blames the victim, stigmatizes those who seek help, and relies on community pressure to keep domestic abuse hidden behind closed doors.

The data also exposes severe institutional negligence regarding risk management and the monitoring of known, violent offenders. The Observatory report reveals that two of the murdered women were under the theoretical protection of active, court-granted protection orders at the exact moment they were killed, rendering the state's guarantee of safety entirely meaningless. Even more indicative of systemic failure is the finding that four women and girls were murdered just days after their abusers were released from prison, having served sentences for prior domestic violence. The lack of inter-agency communication, failure to notify victims of an abuser's release, and the total absence of post-release monitoring essentially facilitated these murders. Additionally, in several instances, perpetrators committed suicide immediately following the femicide, further complicating the pursuit of post-mortem justice, denying the state the ability to prosecute, and leaving devastated families to navigate the trauma without any form of legal closure or accountability.

When contextualized regionally, Albania's intentional female homicide rate of 0.84 per 100,000 females in 2023 is alarming. While this rate sits in the mid-range when compared to

certain global contexts, it represents a highly acute, localized crisis within the Western Balkans. The rate closely tracks the high levels of violence seen in neighboring North Macedonia and significantly surpasses the femicide rates documented in numerous European Union member states.

Findings from Expert Interviews

To examine how Albania's protection system functions in practice, interviews were conducted with representatives of the Commissioner for Protection from Discrimination (KMD) and the Albanian Women Empowerment Network (AWEN). Together, the interviews indicate that the country's principal shortcomings no longer lie primarily in legislation itself, but in the implementation of existing legal obligations.

The KMD interview highlighted the importance of the anti-discrimination framework as a complementary mechanism to criminal law. While criminal proceedings address individual offences, anti-discrimination procedures can identify and challenge recurring institutional failures that disproportionately affect women, including unequal access to protection, legal aid, housing, healthcare, and social services. The findings further suggest that these shortcomings often have an intersectional dimension, particularly where gender-based violence intersects with poverty, disability, ethnicity, migration, or rural isolation. The interview also drew attention to the largely overlooked consequences of femicide for surviving family members, emphasizing the long-term psychological, social, and economic impacts experienced by children and other dependents.

The AWEN interview confirmed that the main challenges arise from uneven implementation rather than legislative deficiencies. Despite significant legal reforms, protection services remain concentrated in larger urban areas, while many municipalities lack adequate shelter capacity and specialized support. Continued dependence on donor funding further limits the sustainability of services. Access to state-funded legal aid also remains problematic, with administrative procedures frequently preventing women from obtaining legal representation within the short deadlines applicable to emergency protection orders.

Another important finding concerns the relationship between cyberviolence and physical violence. AWEN's experience suggests that online threats, digital surveillance, and other forms of technology-facilitated abuse frequently precede physical violence and should therefore be treated as indicators of elevated risk. Although Albanian legislation already provides mechanisms for digital risk assessment and evidence collection, implementation remains inconsistent.

Finally, the interviews identified long-term reintegration as one of the weakest components of Albania's protection system. Limited access to housing, employment, and long-term social support often leaves survivors economically dependent after leaving shelters, increasing the risk of returning to abusive environments.

Overall, the qualitative findings reinforce the broader documentary analysis presented in this paper. Rather than revealing major legislative deficiencies, they point to persistent implementation gaps characterized by weak institutional coordination, insufficient funding, unequal territorial access to services, and limited accountability. Strengthening Albania's response to femicide therefore requires not only continued legal reform but also more effective implementation of the protections already established in law.

Femicide in North Macedonia

In 2023, in line with its commitment to the Istanbul Convention, North Macedonia amended its Criminal Code to expand the scope of sexual violence to include femicide, genital mutilation, sexual harassment and stalking, thus becoming the first and only nation in the Western Balkans to fully criminalize femicide (UN Women, 2023a). The amended Code defines femicide as a form of murder with a gendered motivation and prescribes a minimum of ten years in prison for taking the life of a woman or of a girl under the age of eighteen (Assembly of the Republic of North Macedonia, 2025, pp.19). Legal protection was also extended to other forms of gender-based violence, including stalking, kidnapping, rape, sexual assault and physical injury (*ibid.*). Under the Code, government institutions are obliged to intervene in cases of femicide and gender-based violence, social services must work directly with perpetrators to correct their behavior and prevent escalation, and police forces are tasked with strengthening their capacities and conducting risk assessments to determine the severity of each situation (*ibid.*, 21). These changes reflect the country's commitments under the Istanbul Convention, the National Strategy for Gender Equality 2022–2027, and the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (*ibid.*). Despite this progress, implementation remains a challenge, leaving cases of gender-based violence neglected and unsolved (National Network to End Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence, 2025).

These amendments, however, came only after numerous femicides in which inadequate legislation left victims unprotected. An analysis conducted under UNDP North Macedonia, covering eight cities including the capital Skopje, found that fourteen of the sixteen murders of

women between 2017 and 2020 could be classified as femicides (UNDP, 2021, pp.18). Most victims were women over the age of 61; ten were ethnically Macedonian, three Albanian and two Roma (ibid.). All were killed by an intimate partner or family member, in some cases by their own sons or grandsons, and the leading motive was conflictual intimate-partner relationships, most of which involved psychological and physical violence as well as death threats (ibid.).

An earlier analysis of femicides committed between 2008 and 2016 reveals similar patterns. Of the thirty-four identified cases, most victims and perpetrators were between 41 and 50 years old (National Network to End Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence, 2018, pp. 24). Most femicides were committed by spouses, extramarital partners or intimate partners, confirming a longstanding trend of intimate-partner violence in North Macedonia (ibid., 25). The majority of cases went unreported to police and social services, as victims were unable to leave their homes or were economically dependent on their abusers (ibid., 26) – an underreporting that also signals distrust in institutions and leaves victims trapped in cycles of violence. As in the later period, the dominant motive was conflictual intimate relationships, with victims suffering prolonged psychological abuse and death threats before the crime (ibid., 27). Taken together, the two studies demonstrate that North Macedonia's justice system failed victims over an extended period: institutions rarely treated prior domestic violence as an aggravating circumstance, despite evidence that most victims had endured abuse before their deaths (ibid., 28). Perpetrators were typically sentenced to between 10 and 40 years in prison, though in some exceptional cases they were confined to mental health facilities due to severe psychological disorders (ibid.).

Has the Law Been Applied? Femicide Cases After 2023

The law's early record is troubling. In September of 2023, a few short months after the amendment entered into force, a 46-year-old woman in the city of Kochani was stabbed forty times outside of her home by a man who had loaned her money (Koshevaliska et al, 2024, pp.206). Prior to the crime, the woman had reported the perpetrator numerous times to the authorities which unfortunately failed to protect her (ibid., 207). Following the killing, a number of NGOs and The Helsinki Committee for Human Rights demanded that the case be treated as femicide and that an investigation be launched into whether the woman's reports were properly processed (ibid.). The perpetrator received a life sentence for murder committed with a gender-based motive – yet he was not charged with femicide itself, raising the question of why prosecutors were reluctant to apply the new provision. Moreover, this example further

illustrates the ineffectiveness of the police and institutions in addressing reports of gender-based violence. It is unknown whether the police had conducted a risk assessment after the victim's report.

At the time of writing, there is no comprehensive report on the exact number of femicides and instances of gender-based violence in North Macedonia since the 2023 amendment. Even high-profile cases, such as Rosica Koceva in 2025, and Ivana Stojanovska and her daughter in 2026, which have gained massive media attention and generated public discourse on legal protections for gender-based violence, suggest that killings which could qualify as femicide may still be prosecuted as abuse or homicide – a signal of poor implementation and inadequate prosecution.

Ethnicity compounds these failures. In May of 2025, Ramajana Asan, a Romani woman, was murdered by her partner in their home in Skopje in front of their daughter (European Roma Rights Center, 2025, p.3). Similar to other cases, Ramajana's story details her multiple attempts to file criminal complaints against her abuser, with instances of abuse being witnessed by her father and others (ibid.). However, officials dismissed her multiple complaints, stating that she would make amends with her abuser (ibid.). Romani women face additional institutional barriers when reporting cases of abuse to the authorities, which results in feelings of abandonment and loneliness due to inadequate protection (ibid., 4).

In May 2026, 31-year-old Ajnet Vejsel was stabbed to death by her former partner in Bitola (APLA, 2026). At the time of writing, there is little media coverage on her story with few details indicating that she was stabbed to death by her former partner in front of her home (ibid.). The victim's family indicated that she had suffered abuse prior to the murder, which was underreported due to their children (ibid.).

As a result of these institutional failures to protect Romani women, Isi Arka, an organization which deals with women's rights within the Roma community, launched Project 101254762-Arakhel (2026-2028) offering tailored services to Roma communities (Isi Arka, 2026). Although this project is a step forward in the right direction, it does not erase the need for institutional support for Romani women when dealing with gender-based violence.

CSOs in North Macedonia have repeatedly highlighted the state's inefficiencies in protecting women from gender-based violence and getting justice for victims of femicide. Prevention and risk assessment are still the most neglected areas even with laws in place. For example, there are various training courses offered to state institutions to recognize when abuse takes place which have yielded little results (Gagovska, 2025). Furthermore, there is an even bigger issue

in coordination amongst multiple institutions with the police force and prosecution, making it immensely difficult for victims to seek protection and justice (ibid.). A fragmented justice system often leads victims of abuse to withdraw their reports to the police which leaves them only as “complaints” on record (ibid.). Multiple CSO networks, such as the National Network for Ending Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence have a longstanding history of advocacy, specifically targeting institutions and stakeholders that can bring about change. Additionally, the national network Women for Women has united organizations based in communities such as Veles, Kumanovo and Bitola to combat patriarchal norms and promote activism within young girls (Women for Women, 2026).

Headlines and Perception: The Role of Media

Media portrayal of femicide cases plays a vital role in shaping public opinion and, potentially, the institutional response and legal consequences that follow the crime (UNDP, 2021, pp.23). Although traditional media has become better at reporting on gender-based violence and femicide, it still does not take into account the deeply rooted systemic inequalities that can cause social imbalances between men and women (ibid.). Part of this issue stems from the cultural “silence” on femicide and violence towards women, making it difficult for the media to adequately report on the topics (Jahjaova, 2022, pp.68). In turn, this creates a negative cycle of reinforcing gender stereotypes, victim blaming and stigmatization, shifting the focus from the perpetrator and lack of institutional response (ibid.).

Most of the coverage on femicide contains generic information that does not take into account the socio-political context of the crime, which is especially relevant in the Western Balkans, and its language and imagery downplay the gendered nature of the killing for engagement (Trajkovski, 2025, pp.189). Analysis of 2017-2020 coverage found that reporters portrayed cases of femicide as “family drama” or “love drama,” reducing the crimes to trivial disputes between intimate partners. Only one media outlet used the term “femicide” when referring to the crime (UNDP, 2021, pp.24).

On social media, posts about these media articles receive public comments that mostly condemn the violence, but some justify perpetrators or blame victims – including misogynistic comments from other women (Institute of Communication Studies, 2023, pp. 16; Trajkovski, 2025, pp.189-190). In addition, a survey of 100 social media users in North Macedonia found strong agreement that social media normalizes abuse against women while failing to provide victims a platform (Sherovska, 2024, pp. 302). Respondents to the questionnaire strongly

indicated that social media facilitates a culture of violence against women, normalizes abuse towards them, and does not provide sufficient space for victims to share their stories (ibid.)

A recent independent analysis examined which female-/femicide-related content gains the most traction with the Macedonian public, focusing on the previously-mentioned cases of Rosica Koceva, and Ivana Stojanoska and her daughter, Katja. In the Koceva case, the most popular article was one in which another woman detailed her experience with Rosica's killer, revealing that she had reported him to the police twelve years prior to the crime (Dimova, 2026). That article alone generated 2,126 engagements and reached over 115,000 people despite not containing any details on the Rosica case itself (ibid.). The second most engaging article revealed that Rosica had written a letter to the Minister of Interior, Panche Toshkovski, five months before being murdered. This revelation reframed the case around institutional failure and negligence, which proved to be more "moving" to the general public than the crime itself (ibid.). The Stojanovska case illustrates how media coverage treats femicide as a concept but disregards the actual victim: each new occurrence prompts references to previous femicides as context but never demands justice for the victims.

5. Femicide in Serbia

In its March 2025 Annual Report for 2024, Serbia's Commissioner for the Protection of Equality stated that 19 women were killed in Serbia that year, and 415 women and girls had been murdered between 2011 and 2024. More than half were killed in their homes by current or former partners and that many had previously reported violence to the authorities (Commissioner for Protection of Equality, 2025). The report further emphasized that femicide remains the most extreme manifestation of gender-based violence and highlighted the continued absence of a systematic national femicide monitoring mechanism in Serbia.

In 2025, monitoring by FemPlatz, a Serbian feminist organization that tracks femicide and other forms of gender-based violence while advocating for legal and policy reforms, recorded at least 18 femicides and 13 attempted femicides. The organization emphasized that these figures are likely to represent only a minimum, as incomplete public information on gender-related killings limits comprehensive documentation. Furthermore, FemPlatz's analysis of 94 judicial rulings on femicide and attempted femicide from 2015 to 2019 found that women were most often killed at home or in a home shared with the perpetrator; nearly half of the victims were killed by a spouse, common-law partner, former partner, or a man with whom they were in an intimate relationship (Beker, 2021). The same research found that court files often

contained no data on whether risk assessments had been carried out in cases with prior domestic violence, and that timely protective measures under the Law on Prevention of Domestic Violence were lacking. Among the survivors of attempted femicide in the sample, only 20% had gone to the police beforehand. The pattern is clear: home remains the most dangerous place, intimate control remains central, and the system far too often reacts late or not at all (Beker, 2021).

Civil society as a compensatory actor in the absence of institutional mechanisms

Because state institutions have failed to build a coherent anti-femicide infrastructure, civil society organizations have taken over the monitoring, research, and advocacy work. FemPlatz maintains an interactive regional femicide map based on media reports, cross-checked with official institutions and partner organizations. It has presented this mechanism as a model for a future official femicide monitoring body (FemPlatz, 2026). Its broader body of work includes the first interdisciplinary research on femicide in Serbia, analyses of institutional capacities, judicial practice, attempted femicide, and the role of firearms in killings of women.

This body of research points to several recurring patterns: women are most often killed in their own homes, perpetrators are predominantly current or former intimate partners or family members, prior violence frequently preceded the killings, and institutional responses often failed to recognize escalating risk in time. The studies also found that judicial proceedings frequently focused on perpetrators rather than patterns of gender-based violence, that histories of abuse were inconsistently treated in court, and that available data systems remained fragmented and insufficient for prevention-oriented policy making. Particularly significant was the finding that firearms were among the recurring means used in intimate partner femicide-suicide cases, reinforcing earlier evidence that weapon availability functions as an important lethality risk factor in gender-based violence.

At the same time, FemPlatz has also articulated three structural reforms: i) criminalization of femicide as a separate offence, ii) a unified and centralized database on violence against women and femicide, and iii) the establishment of an independent Femicide Watch (FemPlatz, 2026). Based on its research, FemPlatz and partner organizations wrote to competent institutions in 2020, to members of parliament in 2022, and in 2023 submitted a proposal to the Ministry of Justice working group on Criminal Code amendments (ibid.). The informal network #TogetherAgainstFemicide was formed in March 2023 by 16 organizations to pursue the same agenda: advocating for the establishment of a monitoring body, separate criminalization of

femicide, better regulation of femicide risk assessment, and accountability of local institutions for failures in prevention and prosecution. When more than 70 organizations issued a public call for an urgent institutional response after a spate of femicides and attempted femicides in March 2022, the intervention exposed a deeper structural problem: civil society was not merely raising awareness, but articulating policy demands that should have come from state institutions themselves (Commissioner for Protection of Equality, 2025). The immediate state response was limited and largely rhetorical. Although public officials reiterated commitments to combating violence against women and existing legal mechanisms formally remained in place, the structural demands raised by activists, including improved risk assessment, coordinated prevention measures, transparent femicide monitoring, and stronger institutional accountability, were not followed by a comprehensive policy shift.

In subsequent years, civil society organizations continued to repeat many of the same demands, including the establishment of a national Femicide Watch mechanism, suggesting that institutional responses remained fragmented, reactive, and insufficient rather than strategically transformative. In that sense, the absence of a systemic response became a response in itself. Following the two mass shootings that took place in Serbia in May 2023, including the shooting at Vladislav Ribnikar Primary School in Belgrade and a second attack in the villages near Mladenovac, which together claimed the lives of 18 people and prompted an unprecedented public debate on firearm possession and violence prevention, the government introduced a broad package of disarmament measures. These included a nationwide voluntary firearm surrender campaign, stricter licensing requirements, and enhanced police oversight of registered firearm owners. While these reforms were primarily designed to reduce the risk of mass violence, they also raise an important policy question that remains insufficiently explored: whether large-scale firearm surrender, tighter firearm regulation, and increased police oversight had any measurable effect on the incidence or modalities of femicide and attempted femicide. Existing research on intimate partner femicide-suicide committed with firearms has already demonstrated that firearm availability significantly increases lethality and reduces opportunities for intervention once violence escalates. In that sense, the post-2023 reforms created a rare policy opportunity to examine the relationship between firearm access and gender-based lethal violence, yet this question has so far received little systematic scholarly attention in Serbia (FemPlatz, Women's Research Center for Education and Communication, & Gender Knowledge Hub, 2021).

Institutional implementation gaps in femicide prevention

On paper, the institutional architecture in Serbia appears adequate: the National Gender Equality Strategy identifies the Coordination Body for Gender Equality as the government's standing mechanism for horizontal and vertical coordination on gender equality (Government of the Republic of Serbia, 2021); the Ministry of Human and Minority Rights and Social Dialogue as the line ministry responsible for gender-equality policy, monitoring, and oversight; the Ministry of Justice as responsible for criminal law amendments. However, the strategy also admits that the Coordination Body has operated with limited staffing, organizational and logistical support, and financial resources (Government of the Republic of Serbia, 2021). In the current government architecture, responsibility is also politically linked to a minister without portfolio in charge of gender equality and prevention of violence against women. In other words, Serbia has multiple addresses for responsibility but little accountability.

It is worth noting that the state has not been entirely inactive. GREVIO acknowledged continued mandatory training and emergency protective measures¹ under the Law on Prevention of Domestic Violence, as well as some positive developments in local coordination (GREVIO, 2020). In fact, in September 2025, the government reported that more than 30,000 emergency protective measures had been issued in 2024 (Government of the Republic of Serbia, 2025). The government also announced further amendments to the Law on Prevention of Domestic Violence, the Criminal Code, and the Criminal Procedure Code. However, the persistence of femicide cases, including in situations where prior violence had already been reported, raises questions on whether emergency interventions alone (i.e., without stronger long-term risk assessment, monitoring, and institutional follow-up) are sufficient. By April 2026, it had also adopted support programmes for local gender-equality policy and violence-prevention activities. State institutions have additionally reported adoption of a General Protocol of action and multisectoral cooperation and the creation of several new support services (Council of Europe, 2025).

But that is precisely why the official reassurances ring hollow. In 2025, GREVIO found that the 2021–2025 strategy on gender-based violence had never been operationalized because its action plans were not adopted (Council of Europe, 2025). The Commissioner's 2024 annual report stated that a draft 2024-2025 action plan existed but had not undergone public hearing

¹ These measures refer to urgent police interventions, such as the temporary removal of a suspected perpetrator from the home and temporary bans on contacting or approaching the victim, initially imposed for 48 hours and subject to court extension.

and thus had not been adopted, as well as that the national control mechanism for femicide had not been established (Commissioner for Protection of Equality, 2025). In these circumstances, the government responded by extending the strategy until 2027 instead of addressing the gaps from the original timeframe. Unfortunately, while this is presented as a mere delay in procedure, for an issue like femicide procedural delay costs lives.

The European Commission (2024) notes that Serbia lacks reliable official femicide statistics and depends heavily on civil society for specialist services; GREVIO (2024) finds support services under-resourced, long-term protection orders not effectively enforced, and convictions in cases of violence against women often lenient. This is not a state that is unaware; it is a state that has normalized partial implementation: the Commissioner resubmitted the initiative for a national control mechanism on femicide to the Ministry of Justice. Even the progress made in the legal framework has been slowed by the Constitutional Court's suspension of acts deriving from the Law on Gender Equality (GREVIO, 2024).

Media and Public awareness

A serious anti-femicide policy is impossible without serious public language about violence, and Serbia still fails that test. A 2024 analysis of 10,826 media reports by Journalists Against Violence Against Women supported by UNDP found that 35% revealed the identity of the survivor, victim, or her family, 27% used sensationalist or stereotypical language, and 56% of headlines or teasers violated at least one basic principle of ethical reporting (UNDP, 2026). The media still focused overwhelmingly on individual incidents: 77% of articles reported on specific cases, while only 18% dealt with prevention, broader social context, or public education. This is not a minor professional problem. When media coverage turns femicide into a lurid headline, it teaches spectatorship instead of prevention (UNDP Serbia, 2026).

The deeper problem is framing. Femicide is still treated as ordinary crime reporting rather than as the most extreme consequence of systemic gender-based violence (UNDP Serbia, 2025). The history of prior violence appeared in only about one-third of the analyzed reporting, and the media rarely pursued institutional accountability further. That omission matters because it reproduces the same logic institutions rely on: focus on the fatal outcome, not on the failures that made it possible.

In Serbia, this has an additional bitter irony: because official femicide statistics are inadequate, NGOs often build minimum counts partly from reports by the same media ecosystem that sensationalizes women's deaths. The rules already exist. The guidelines developed by

Journalists Against Violence Against Women explicitly tell reporters not to shift responsibility onto the victim by implying she should have reported earlier, and to place femicide in the continuity of prior abuse (Journalists against Violence against Women, 2019) but these are not consistently applied. The media culture needs to stop packaging the murder of women as consumable content and start treating violence against women as a social emergency.

Perspectives from Serbian politics and civil society

To complement the analysis, two semi-structured interviews² were conducted with individuals actively engaged in the fields of women's rights advocacy and policymaking. Natalija Stojmenović, the youngest Member of Parliament in the National Assembly of Serbia and a representative of the Green-Left Front, argues that the situation regarding violence against women has significantly deteriorated in recent years. Serbia is witnessing not only the persistence of gender-based violence but also the expansion of newer forms, such as digital violence. She emphasizes that the problem is accompanied by broader legislative and institutional setbacks, including attempts to narrow legal protections for women and a lack of political commitment to addressing femicide as a systemic issue. While expressing concern about the current institutional response, she highlights the importance of women's activism and social mobilization as drivers of future reforms. In her view, meaningful progress requires the development of a new social consensus that recognizes women's safety in both public and private spheres as a fundamental democratic value.

Similar concerns were raised by Marija Virijević, a long-term women's rights activist and former SOS hotline worker supporting women survivors of domestic violence. Virijević points out that Serbia still lacks an official database on femicide, forcing the public to rely largely on media reports to understand the scope of the problem. She stresses that hundreds of women and girls have been killed over the past decade, while many deaths resulting from prolonged violence remain invisible and unrecognized as femicides. According to her, the absence of a comprehensive institutional response demonstrates that femicide is not yet treated as a priority issue by the state. Virijević further argues that recognizing femicide as a separate criminal offence would strengthen prevention efforts by ensuring that gender-based motives, patterns of

² It should be noted that, in the context of the ongoing student-led protests in Serbia, the student movement and a number of feminist organizations have adopted a position of refusing dialogue with state institutions until new elections are called. In respect of this collective decision, representatives of state institutions were not contacted for interviews as part of this analysis. Consequently, the interview component of this research focuses on perspectives from civil society and opposition political actors engaged in advancing women's rights and combating gender-based violence.

prior abuse, and the structural nature of violence against women are adequately reflected in criminal proceedings and sentencing practices.

Both interviewees underline that legal reform alone is insufficient without institutional accountability, improved protection mechanisms for women experiencing violence, comprehensive data collection systems, and broader societal efforts to challenge the normalization of misogyny and violence against women.

6. Regional perspective

The struggle for the legal recognition of femicide in each of these countries does not exist in a vacuum. Shared patriarchal structures, fragile justice systems in transition, and a common historical legacy make the region a unified arena for advocacy, and evidence gathered by civil society networks strongly suggests that coordinated regional strategies outperform isolated national efforts.

The evidence gathered by civil society networks strongly suggests that isolated national efforts are vastly less effective than coordinated, regional strategies. A regional report published in March 2023 by a coalition including the Center for Legal Civic Initiatives (Albania), the Helpline for Women and Children (Montenegro) and FemPlatz (Serbia) documented an upward trajectory of violence – Serbia alone recorded 27 femicides in 2022 and 22 more by August 2023, many committed with illicit firearms in defiance of active restraining orders – and its central recommendation was the establishment of independent femicide watches in every Western Balkan state, eventually culminating in a unified Regional Femicide Watch (Funa, 2023; Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation, 2023). The primary, unifying recommendation emerging from this regional civil society coalition is the absolute necessity of establishing centralized, independent “Femicide Watches” or observatories in every Western Balkan state, eventually culminating in a unified Regional Femicide Watch. These mechanisms, operating free from direct police or political interference, are required to analyze the entire chain of events leading up to a murder, meticulously mapping the specific institutional omissions (from ignored police reports to inadequate judicial sentencing) that allowed the perpetrator to succeed.

Within this regional landscape, North Macedonia demonstrates that legislative change is possible: following years of sustained pressure from civil society, rigorous policy advocacy, and a collaborative drafting process involving the Ministry of Justice, resulted in the 2023 amendment of its Criminal Code to criminalize femicide in line with the provisions of the

Istanbul Convention (adding point 2a to Article 123) (Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation, 2023). By doing so, North Macedonia became the first nation in the Western Balkans to legally name the crime, proving that deep-seated legislative resistance and patriarchal inertia can be overcome (AIRE, 2025). By contrast, the Serbian legal and political systems continue to resist the criminalization of femicide (FemPlatz & Fenomena, 2026). Activists, particularly youth-led movements, have repeatedly taken to the streets, linking the fight against gender-based violence to broader, national anti-corruption and anti-impunity protests. Albania shows largely the same legal resistance.

The contrast between North Macedonia's legislative success and the ongoing struggles in Serbia and Albania underscores the necessity of sharing advocacy tactics, legal templates, and public awareness strategies across the borders of the Western Balkans. The regional comparison also demonstrates that anti-femicide policy does not depend on a single model. Albania prioritized monitoring and institutional review mechanisms, while North Macedonia moved toward criminal-law recognition and multisectoral observatory structures. Neither model is complete, but both illustrate that governments can take concrete institutional steps rather than indefinitely postponing implementation. For Serbia, the regional lesson is not simply comparative but practical: monitoring mechanisms, legal reforms, and inter-institutional review structures are already being operationalized elsewhere in the Western Balkans, making further delay increasingly difficult to justify as a matter of administrative complexity or political timing.

7. Policy Recommendations

An overarching recommendation to be addressed by all countries is the establishment National Femicide Observatories of Albania, North Macedonia, and Serbia, which must formalize cross-border data-sharing protocols and establish a unified Regional Femicide Watch to track transnational violence trends and harmonize judicial best practices. A formalized regional approach will harmonize legal definitions, allow for the precise tracking of transnational violence trends, and facilitate the rapid sharing of the best judicial practices and successful legislative templates. By creating a unified, cross-border legal and advocacy front, the nations of the Western Balkans can collectively dismantle the culture of impunity that has allowed femicide to persist.

This is followed by country-specific recommendations:

7.1 Albania

The social outcry against femicide, coupled with the evidence on institutional failure, must be channeled into precise, actionable, and systemic policy interventions. The analysis of the Albanian context confirms that gradual, piecemeal solutions will not produce lasting change. The following interventions represent the minimum required to address gender-based killings.

- **The Albanian Parliament** should amend the Criminal Code to introduce femicide as a distinct, standalone criminal offense, with a definition that captures gender-based intent, intimate partner violence, sexual exploitation, cyber-harassment, and “honor” codes.
- **The Albanian Parliament** should expand the statutory authority, access to classified institutional files, and funding of the Femicide Observatory within the Office of the People’s Advocate to mandate exhaustive, retrospective domestic homicide reviews for every gender-based killing and violence-induced suicide. The Office of the People’s Advocate should be responsible for establishing, coordinating, and managing the Observatory, while ensuring the systematic participation of the State Police, the General Prosecution Office, the judiciary, healthcare institutions, social services, and civil society organizations in case reviews and data collection.
- **The Ministry of Interior and the Ministry of Health and Social Protection** should deploy standardized, mandatory multi-agency risk-assessment tools across all local police precincts and social service providers in accordance with Article 51 of the Istanbul Convention.
- **General Directorate of Prisons, in coordination with the State Police**, should establish an automatic notification system that alerts both the victim and the relevant local police precinct immediately when a convicted perpetrator of domestic or sexual violence is granted early release, parole, or completes their sentence.
- **The Ministry of Justice and the General Prosecution Office** should launch a formal inquiry into the high attrition rates in gender-based violence cases to determine the systemic causes behind case delays and dismissals.
- **The State Police and judicial authorities** should ensure that any breach of a court-granted protection order triggers immediate, non-negotiable criminal detention of the perpetrator.

7.2 North Macedonia

North Macedonia's challenge is no longer primarily legislative but institutional: implementation gaps continue to undermine the protection the 2023 law promises. The country should prioritize the following actions:

- **The Government of North Macedonia** should establish a National Femicide Observatory as a permanent multi-institutional body responsible for collecting and analyzing data on femicide, conducting domestic homicide reviews, and issuing recommendations for institutional reform. The Observatory should operate under the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy, with the mandatory participation of the Ministry of Interior, the Public Prosecutor's Office, the judiciary, healthcare institutions, social services, academia, and civil society organizations, in line with the recommendations of GREVIO and the CEDAW Committee on strengthening data collection, institutional coordination, and femicide monitoring.
- **The Ministry of Health** should develop and implement a standardized curriculum on gender-based violence and femicide prevention for healthcare professionals, ensuring consistent training and risk-assessment practices across urban and rural areas.
- **The Ministry of Education and Science** should introduce mandatory training for teachers and school staff on gender-based violence prevention and integrate education on gender equality, healthy relationships, and violence prevention into school curricula.
- **The Ministry of Justice, Public Prosecutor's Office, and judicial authorities** should ensure the timely investigation and prosecution of femicide and gender-based violence cases, reduce delays in court proceedings, and strengthen sentencing practices to reflect the severity of these crimes.
- **Courts and law enforcement authorities** should strengthen the implementation and monitoring of restraining orders and other protective measures, ensuring that victims are effectively protected from repeat violence.
- **The Ministry of Labor** should expand access to shelters, legal aid, psychological support, and other victim services, while strengthening coordination among social services, healthcare providers, police, and civil society organizations.
- **The Government of North Macedonia** must ensure that services for victims of gender-based violence are accessible in Albanian, Romani, Turkish, and other minority languages, particularly through national helplines, public institutions, and community outreach programs.

- **The Ministry of Health and relevant public institutions** should improve access to healthcare and support services for women living in Roma settlements and other underserved communities.
- **The Agency for Audio and Audiovisual Media Services and the Council of Media Ethics** should strengthen monitoring of media reporting on femicide and gender-based violence and impose sanctions on sensationalist, victim-blaming, or gender-insensitive reporting.

7.3. Serbia

Serbia's central challenge is one of implementation. The persistence of femicide despite repeated warnings from domestic and international monitoring bodies demonstrates the need for the following measures:

- **The Government of Serbia and the Coordination Body for Gender Equality** should establish measurable implementation obligations, designated responsible institutions, budgetary commitments, and regular public reporting for the Strategy for Preventing and Combating Gender-Based Violence against Women.
- **The Ministry of Justice and the National Assembly** should establish, without further delay, a national femicide monitoring mechanism and a centralized database on violence against women and femicide; the Protector of Citizens (Ombudsman) should host an independent Femicide Observatory responsible for coordinating the mechanism, collecting and analyzing data, conducting domestic homicide reviews, issuing recommendations, and monitoring institutional compliance with those recommendations.
- **The Commissioner for the Protection of Equality, the Protector of Citizens, and parliamentary committees** should strengthen oversight of the implementation of Serbia's commitments on preventing gender-based violence and femicide, drawing on GREVIO and European Commission monitoring.
- **Police, prosecutors, courts, and Centres for Social Work** should strengthen femicide risk assessment, improve enforcement of long-term protection orders, and conduct mandatory reviews after every femicide and attempted femicide; judicial authorities should ensure risk assessments are systematically documented and reflected in proceedings and protection measures.
- **The Government of Serbia and local self-governments** should provide sustainable

financing for specialist women's services, safe houses, and crisis support, with equal territorial availability.

- **Editors, media owners, journalists, the Press Council, and relevant regulators** should consistently apply existing guidelines on reporting gender-based violence and femicide, and ensure accountability for victim-blaming, sensationalism, and violations of victims' privacy.
- **Civil society organizations, Members of Parliament, journalists, youth leaders, and citizens** should use shadow reporting, strategic litigation, public hearings, parliamentary questions, and media scrutiny to demand transparency, adequate funding, legal reform, and institutional responsibility for failures to prevent femicide.

8. Conclusion

Albania, North Macedonia, and Serbia and Albania continue to fall short in protecting women from gender-based violence and in preventing it. North Macedonia's criminalization of femicide is a genuine legislative achievement, but cases occurring since 2023 show that without implementation and a monitoring mechanism the law has produced few tangible changes. Albania and Serbia have been stagnant, leaving victims to confront institutional barriers and social stigma when seeking help. In order for progress to be made, both should criminalize femicide and ensure the provision is applied in practice. In all three countries, civil society is carrying burdens that belong to the state – and state institutions must recognize that the primary responsibility lies with them. Women's safety should not be an abstract concept that exists only on paper; it should be the norm of everyday life. The evidence compiled here makes clear that all three countries are in urgent need of reform, and that the region as a whole stands to benefit from collective progress on this issue.

Bibliography

- Academic Council on the United Nations System. (2016). *Femicide volume V: A global issue that demands action*.
- Albanian Daily News. (2026). *Albanian Parliament approves amendments to criminal code after marathon session*. <https://albaniandailynews.com/news/albanian-parliament-approves-amendments-to-criminal-code-after-marathon-session>
- Anna Lindh Foundation. (2026). *Center for Gender Justice in Albania*.
<https://alf.website/en/?members=center-for-gender-justice-in-albania>
- APLA. (2026). *Murder in Bitola in the Bair neighborhood: A young woman around thirty years of age was killed*. <https://apla.mk/denes/item/17983-ubistvo-vo-bitola-vo-naselbata-bair-ubiena-e-mlada-zhena-na-okolu-trisetgodishna-vozas>
- Assembly of the Republic of North Macedonia. (2025). *Femicide: Defined and regulated in selected countries. A comparative overview*.
- Balkan Talks. (2026). *In focus*. <https://balkantalks.org/>
- Beker, K. (2023). *Social and institutional responses to femicide in Albania, Montenegro and Serbia*. UN Women.
- Beker, K., & Vilić, V. (2021). *Femicides and attempted femicides in Serbia 2015–2019* (Abridged version). FemPlatz.
- Braçe, T. A. (2023). *Albanians protest over triple femicide by convicted rapist, murderer*. *Euractiv*. <https://www.euractiv.com/news/albanians-protest-over-triple-femicide-by-convicted-rapist-murderer/>
- Canadian Femicide Observatory for Justice and Accountability. (2026). *History of the term femicide*. <https://femicideincanada.ca/what-is-femicide/history/>
- Çibuku, A. (2025). *Every year, a slogan: The protests that marked March 8*. *Citizens.al*.
<https://citizens.al/en/2025/03/08/Every-year--a-slogan-for-the-protests-that-marked-March-8th/>
- Commissioner for the Protection of Equality. (2025). *Regular annual report of the Commissioner for the Protection of Equality for 2024*.
- Council of Europe. (2011). *Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence*.
- Council of Europe. (2025a). *Beyond domestic abuse: Council of Europe body calls for comprehensive action to protect victims of all types of violence against women in Serbia*. <https://www.coe.int/en/web/portal/-/beyond-domestic-abuse-council-of-europe-body-calls-for-comprehensive-action-to-protect-victims-of-all-types-of->

[violence-against-women-in-serbia](#)

- Council of Europe. (2025b). *Reply of the Ministry of Justice on the alert published on the Platform to Promote the Protection of Journalism and Safety of Journalists regarding the draft criminal code*. Retrieved from: <https://rm.coe.int/albania-en-reply-19dec2025-draft-criminal-code-includes-provisions-aff/488029dfa3> b
- Council of Europe. (2026). *The Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (Istanbul Convention)*.
<https://www.coe.int/en/web/gender-matters/council-of-europe-convention-on-preventing-and-combating-violence-against-women-and-domestic-violence>
- Dimova, N. (2026). *When the headlines fade: Media coverage of femicides in North Macedonia*. Pikasa. <https://pikasa.ai/post/138/when-the-headlines-fade-media-coverage-of-femicides-in-north-macedonia>
- EU Support for the Rule of Law. (2025a). *Healthcare professionals. A safer future: Strengthening the prevention of gender-based violence through professional training in North Macedonia*.
- EU Support for the Rule of Law. (2025b). *Educational professionals. A safer future: Strengthening the prevention of gender-based violence through professional training in North Macedonia*.
- European Commission. (2024a). *Albania 2024 report*.
- European Commission. (2024b). *Serbia report 2024*.
- European Institute for Gender Equality. (2021). *Femicide*. https://eige.europa.eu/gender-based-violence/femicide?language_content_entity=en
- European Roma Rights Centre. (2025). *Written comments of the European Roma Rights Centre, concerning North Macedonia*.
- FemPlatz, & Fenomena. (2024). *Submission to the Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (GREVIO) in the process of first thematic evaluation round for Serbia*.
- FemPlatz, & Fenomena. (2026). *Submission to the Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (GREVIO) in the process of first thematic evaluation round for Serbia*.
- FemPlatz. (n.d.). *Femicide watch and related initiatives*.
<https://www.femplatz.org/index.php?n92=>
- Funa, A. (2023). *Femicide in the Balkans: An alarming situation*. Global Campus of Human Rights. <https://www.gchumanrights.org/preparedness/femicide-in-the-balkans-an->

[alarming-situation/](#)

Gagovska, E. (2023). *Anatomy of the Kočani murder*. Prizma. <https://prizma.mk/anatomija-na-ubistvoto-vo-kochani/>

Gagovska, E. (2025). North Macedonia ‘not doing enough’ to protect women victims of violence. *Balkan Insight*. <https://balkaninsight.com/2025/12/10/north-macedonia-not-doing-enough-to-protect-women-victims-of-violence/bi/>

GOV.UK. (2026a). *Country policy and information note: Gender-based violence, Albania, April 2026 (accessible)*. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/albania-country-policy-and-information-notes/country-policy-and-information-note-gender-based-violence-albania-april-2026-accessible>

GOV.UK. (2026b). *Country policy and information note — Albania: Gender-based violence*.

Government of the Republic of Serbia. (2021). *National strategy for gender equality 2021–2030*.

Government of the Republic of Serbia. (2022). *Government adopts conclusion regarding initiative to amend criminal code*.

<https://www.srbija.gov.rs/vest/en/196318/government-adopts-conclusion-regarding-initiative-to-amend-criminal-code.php>

Government of the Republic of Serbia. (2025a). *Serbia makes significant step in fight against violence against women*. <https://www.srbija.gov.rs/vest/en/263167/serbia-makes-significant-step-in-fight-against-violence-against-women.php>

Government of the Republic of Serbia. (2025b). *Government adopts series of documents, decisions, resolutions*. <https://www.srbija.gov.rs/vest/en/266518/government-adopts-series-of-documents-decisions-resolutions.php>

Government of the Republic of Serbia. (2026a). *Serbia continuously improves position of women, families*. <https://www.srbija.gov.rs/vest/en/272462/serbia-continuously-improves-position-of-women-families.php>

Government of the Republic of Serbia. (2026b). *Government establishes gender equality policy support programme*. <https://www.srbija.gov.rs/vest/en/275753/government-establishes-gender-equality-policy-support-programme.php>

Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence. (2023a). *4th general report on GREVIO’s activities*. Council of Europe.

Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence. (2023b). *GREVIO’s baseline evaluation report on legislative and other measures giving effect to the provisions of the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and*

Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (Istanbul Convention), North Macedonia.

Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence.

(2024a). *First thematic evaluation report: Building trust by delivering support, protection and justice, Albania*. Council of Europe.

Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence.

(2024b). *5th general report on GREVIO's activities*. Council of Europe.

Grzyb, M., Naudi, M., & Marcuello-Servós, C. (2018). Femicide definitions. In S. Weil, C. Corradi, & M. Naudi (Eds.), *Femicide across Europe* (pp. 17–31). Bristol University Press.

Hefti, A. (2022). Conceptualizing femicide as a human rights violation. In A. Hefti (Ed.), *Conceptualizing femicide as a human rights violation: State responsibility under international law* (pp. 240–268). Edward Elgar Publishing.

Inquirer.net. (2026). *Albania: Femicide cases expose gaps in protection system*.

<https://globalnation.inquirer.net/311079/albania-femicide-cases-expose-gaps-in-protection-system>

Institute of Communication Studies. (2023). *Gender-based content analysis: Femicide in Macedonian media*.

Isi Arka. (2026). *Project 101254762 — Arakhel — CERV-2025-DAPHNE*.

<https://zenisutoorizari.org.mk/en/проект-101254762-аракел-cerv-2025-daphne/>

Jahjaova, A. (2022). Femicides in the Republic of North Macedonia in the period from 2017–2021. *Student's Social Science Journal*, 14(14), 59–70.

Journalists against Violence against Women. (2019). *Guidelines on media reporting on violence against women* [PowerPoint slides].

https://serbia.un.org/sites/default/files/2020-11/undp_rs_Novinarke_protiv_nasilja_EN.pdf

Jovanovska, B. (2022). *Invisible murders: Femicides in North Macedonia*. National Agency for Gender Equality.

Kaçupi, K. (2026). Femicide in Albania: Analysis of criminal legislation in the perspective of international obligations. *Academic Journal of Business, Administration, Law and Social Sciences*, 12(1), 61–69.

Kadriu, E. (2024). *Report: 32 women were killed in the last three years in Albania*.

Citizens.al. <https://citizens.al/en/2024/12/10/report-32-women-were-killed-in-the-last-three-years-in-Albania/>

- Koshevaliska, O., Nanev, L., & Maksimova, E. (2024). From femicide to murder in self-defense: The culmination of gender-based violence in R. N. Macedonia, with reference to national legislation and practice. *Social Changes in the Global World: International Scientific Conference*, 195–211.
- Koycheva, A. (2017). *The Istanbul Convention and the legal implications of a possible accession of the EU* [PowerPoint slides]. Rights, Equality and Citizenship Programme 2014–2020. https://www.era-comm.eu/oldoku/SNLLaw/14_Other_topics/117DV27_KOCHEVA_EN.pdf
- Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation. (2023). *Women's rights in Western Balkans: Women in politics, gender-based violence and security for women*.
- Maksimović, B. R., & Popović, S. (2025). *How Serbian students created the largest protest movement in decades*. Journal of Democracy. <https://www.journalofdemocracy.org/online-exclusive/how-serbian-students-created-the-largest-protest-movement-in-decades/>
- Monitoring Network Against Gender-Based Violence. (2025). *Shadow report of the Monitoring Network Against Gender-Based Violence on the implementation of Platform for Action, Beijing +30*.
- National Network to End Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence. (2018). *Analysis of cases of femicide — killings of women — in the Republic of Macedonia*. National and University Library St. Kliment of Ohrid.
- National Network to End Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence. (2023). *Roundtable: Femicide in North Macedonia — the effectiveness of the judicial response*. <https://glasprotivnasilstvo.org.mk/en/roundtable-femicide-in-north-macedonia-the-effectiveness-of-the-judicial-response/>
- National Network to End Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence. (2025). *The observatory on femicide: A new mechanism for protection and prevention*. <https://glasprotivnasilstvo.org.mk/en/the-observatory-on-femicide-a-new-mechanism-for-protection-and-prevention/>
- Open Society Foundations Western Balkans. (2025). *Regional youth leadership mobility programme*. <https://osfwb.org/project/regional-youth-leadership-mobility-programme/>
- Petreska, E. (2022). In North Macedonia, old thinking dictates the justice for gender-based violence. *Balkan Insight*. <https://balkaninsight.com/2022/09/15/in-north-macedonia-old-thinking-dictates-justice-for-gender-based-violence/bi/>
- Science and Innovation for Development Centre [SCiDEV]. (2025a). *Regional youth*

leadership mobility programme 2025–2026.

<https://scidevcenter.org/2025/09/29/regional-youth-leadership-mobility-programme-2025-2026/>

Science and Innovation for Development Centre [SCiDEV]. (2025b). *RYLMP launch: Strengthening youth leadership through regional cooperation, evidence-based advocacy, and mobility.* <https://scidevcenter.org/2025/12/20/rylmp-launch-strengthening-youth-leadership-through-regional-cooperation-evidence-based-advocacy-and-mobility/>

Science and Innovation for Development Centre [SCiDEV]. (2026a). *RYLMP fellows inquire public policies during mobility in Skopje.* <https://scidevcenter.org/2026/03/26/rylmp-fellows-inquire-public-policies-during-mobility-in-skopje/>

Science and Innovation for Development Centre [SCiDEV]. (2026b). *SCiDEV convenes prosecutors, law enforcement, and the media community on the implementation of the January 2026 criminal code amendments.* <https://scidevcenter.org/2026/03/31/scidev-convenes-prosecutors-law-enforcement-and-the-media-community-on-the-implementation-of-the-january-2026-criminal-code-amendments/>

Sherovska, G. (2024). From awareness to action: How social media users respond to femicide cases. *Ninth International Scientific Conference*, 299–304.

Taylor-Brace, A. (2023, March 3). *Albanians protest over triple femicide by convicted rapist, murderer.* EURACTIV. <https://www.euractiv.com/news/albanians-protest-over-triple-femicide-by-convicted-rapist-murderer/>

The Advice on Individual Rights in Europe Centre [AIRE]. (2023b). *Femicide in the Republic of North Macedonia: The state of affairs, the legal framework and the judicial practice.*

The Advice on Individual Rights in Europe Centre [AIRE]. (2023a). *Judicial response to femicide in the Western Balkans: Legal framework and judicial practice.*

The Advice on Individual Rights in Europe Centre [AIRE]. (2025). *Roundtable in Skopje: Femicide is almost preventable, every murder signals systemic failure.* <https://airewb.org/roundtable-in-skopje-femicide-is-almost-preventable-every-murder-signals-systemic-failure/>

Trajkovski, D. (2025). Concept of femicide and femicide in the media. *Social Changes in the Global World: Proceedings of the International Scientific Conference*, 1(12), 183–191.

UN Women Albania. (2024). *Albania launches femicide watch initiative.*

<https://albania.unwomen.org/en/stories/press-release/2024/03/albania-launches-femicide-watch-initiative>

UN Women. (2023a). *New amendments in North Macedonia's Criminal Code expand protection for various forms of violence against women.*

<https://eca.unwomen.org/en/stories/news/2023/06/new-amendments-in-north-macedonias-criminal-code-expand-protection-for-various-forms-of-violence-against-women>

UN Women. (2023b). *Regional report: Social and institutional responses to femicide in Albania, Montenegro and Serbia.*

UN Women. (2023c). *Social and institutional response to femicide in Albania.*

UN Women. (2024a). *32 women were killed in Albania in the last three years — according to the femicide report.* <https://albania.unwomen.org/en/stories/press-release/2024/12/32-women-were-killed-in-albania-in-the-last-three-years-according-to-the-femicide-report>

UN Women. (2024b). *Killing of women and girls and femicide in Albania 2021–2023.* https://albania.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2024-12/web_factsheet_femicide_eng.pdf

UN Women. (2025a). *Why online abuse is real violence and why Albania is preparing to act.* <https://albania.unwomen.org/en/stories/feature-story/2025/12/why-online-abuse-is-real-violence-and-why-albania-is-preparing-to-act-0>

UN Women. (2025b). *Turning data into action: Albania against femicide.* <https://open.unwomen.org/en/story/turning-data-action-albania-against-femicide>

UN Women. (2025c). *Femicides in 2024: Global estimates of intimate partner/family member femicides.*

UN Women. (2025d). *Testing the statistical framework on measuring femicide: The case of Albania* [PowerPoint slides]. <https://unece.org/sites/default/files/2025-04/4-2%20Statistical%20framework%20femicide%20Albania%20%28UN%20Women%29.pdf>

UN Women. (2026). *Albania.* <https://open.unwomen.org/es/country-results/AL>

United Nations Development Programme Serbia. (2025). *Analysis of media reporting on violence against women in 2024.*

United Nations Development Programme Serbia. (2026). *Less blaming women who experienced violence, more unethical headlines.*

<https://www.undp.org/serbia/news/less-blaming-women-who-experienced-violence->

[more-unethical-headlines](#)

United Nations Development Programme. (2021). *Analysis of cases of femicide: Murders of women in the Republic of North Macedonia 2017–2020*.

United Nations Human Rights Treaty Bodies. (2026). *Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women*.

United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime [UNODC], & UN Women. (2025). *Global meeting on measuring femicide and other forms of violence against women and girls presentation: An overview of the pilot in Albania* [PowerPoint slides].

https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/statistics/crime/global_femicide_meeting_2025/session_1/Session1_UNWOMEN_UNODC_Pilot_Lesotho_Albania.pdf

United Women. (2022). *Murders of women in the Western Balkans region 2021 report*.

Vojinović, D. (2024). *Criminalising femicide: What the Western Balkans can learn from global practices?* <https://airewb.org/criminalising-femicide-what-the-western-balkans-can-learn-from-global-practices/>

Women Against Violence Network. (2025). *Youth protests in Serbia & violence against women and girls: Are women paying a higher price for justice?* <https://wave-network.org/youth-protests-in-serbia-and-vawg/>

Women for Women. (2026). *About us: National Network Women for Women Skopje*. <https://zenite.mk/en/about-the-network/>